

[P.39]

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THE CHANGING FORM AND FUNCTIONS OF THE GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

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THE purpose of the present paper is to discuss the changing form, and to show as far as possible the changing functions, of the Grass dance in Gros Ventre culture from the time of its introduction between 1875 and 1880 up to about 1920 when it had faded off to relative insignificance. 121

The Gros Ventre tribe of Montana was one of the many which adopted the Grass dance, sometimes called the Omaha dance, as it spread rapidly over the northern plains in relatively recent times. Wissler studied the distribution and diffusion of the Grass dance as a trait-complex,¹ basing his interpretation upon his own observations, especially among the Blackfeet, and on the descriptions of this dance as published for other tribes. For the Gros Ventres he depended mainly on Kroeber's data,² the only source available, but he himself had visited that tribe and collected, among other specimens, regalia used by them in the Grass 796 177 796 114

¹ Wissler, C., General discussion of shamanistic and dancing societies, AMNH-AP 11, pt. 12 1916, pp. 862-71.

² Kroeber, A. L., Ethnology of the Gros Ventre, AMNH-AP 1, pt. 4, 1908, pp. 234, 238-39.

796 dance.³ Wissler was well aware of the importance of the Grass
114 dance in the transition period of Plains culture from the old to
the new, and suggested further studies be made. Nevertheless,
no one has given us a close-up, so far as I know, of its dynamic
aspects in the life of any one of the tribes who shared the phe-
nomenon.

796 In 1901 Kroeber noted that the Grass dance as then performed
114 by the Gros Ventres differed considerably in form from that
177 which was described to him as having been the case when it was
first adopted. He gives us a brief description of the earlier pro-
cedure, but naturally enough no details regarding the then current
method of carrying out the Grass dance, since his concern was
with the older tribal culture. He merely states: "It is no longer
a young man's dance, nor confined to a certain group. All the
people in the tribe take part in it. It is very similar in character
to the present-day Arapaho crow-dance, as well as in the place it
occupies in the life of the people. Among the Gros Ventre it is
now the only dance held."⁴ Our data, gathered during two visits
to the Fort Belknap Reservation in 1940 and 1945, confirm
Kroeber's and supplement them to a considerable extent.

121 In treating of the Grass dance then, we shall distinguish be-
128 tween an earlier period extending from between 1875 to 1880 up
to about 1890, and a later period comprising the years from
roughly 1890 to 1916. We shall first describe the form of the
Grass dance as it was in the earlier period, then the changes
which were later introduced, and finally we shall discuss the
varying functions during both periods.

THE FORM: EARLIER PERIOD

796 According to Wissler the dance originated with the Dakota
177 about 1860 and is traceable as a development of the older Pawnee
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³ These specimens are in the American Museum of Natural History. Some
of those used in the Gros Ventre Grass dance have been described by
Kroeber, loc. cit.: fork, pp. 270-71; spoon, p. 271; whip, p. 271; crow-belt,
pp. 271-72.

⁴ Kroeber, loc. cit., p. 238.

GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

41

Iruska.⁵ In its diffusion it reached the Assiniboine from the Sioux,⁷⁹⁶
 —Rodnick places the date at 1872,¹⁷⁷—and the Assiniboine in turn
 passed it on to the Gros Ventres, sometime between the years
 1875 and 1880. We arrive at this approximate dating by reckon-
 ing the age of a now venerable old Gros Ventre woman informant¹⁷¹
 who witnessed the actual transfer when she herself was in her
 later twenties or possibly early thirties. From all the evidence at
 our command it is fairly certain that she was born between 1850
 and 1855. This informant not only was an eye-witness of the
 adoption of the ceremony by the Gros Ventres but also partici-
 pated actively, so far as a woman could, in both the earlier and
 later phases of the dance. Before giving details of the regalia,
 personnel, and procedures it might be well to insert at this point
 her account of the actual transfer.

"The Gros Ventres were camped on the Milk River. They⁶⁴⁸
 were joined there by the Assiniboine and the two tribes remained¹⁷⁷
 together while the Assiniboine taught the Gros Ventres the Grass⁷⁹⁶
 dance. The Gros Ventres had never had any dancing of that kind
 before and called it jokingly *inaetenin* (moving-buttocks) refer-
 ring to the way they danced. The Assiniboine gave crow-belts
 (feather bustles) to each of two men, and likewise swords to two
 others. They needed one man as spear (fork) man and two as
atsa'an (waiters, servants). They also gave the Gros Ventres a
 big drum and everything that goes with the dance. The visitors
 showed the different individuals how to use these various things
 and taught the songs and dances that went with each. But they
 didn't do all that for nothing! Of all the things they had to give
 away to the Assiniboine! Even food was included in the ex-
 change. The Gros Ventres had an enormous quantity of food
 prepared and you should have seen the number of puppies we^[262]
 cooked. The Assiniboine surely liked those pups. That was the
 first Grass dance we ever had.

"Then we moved camp from the Milk River over toward the⁷⁹⁶

⁵ Wissler, loc. cit., cf. table opp. p. 868.

⁶ Rodnick, David, *The Fort Belknap Assiniboine of Montana, A study in culture change*, New Haven, Conn., 1938, pp. 123-24.

796 Bear Paw Mountains. It was there that the Gros Ventres had their first Grass dance alone. I don't know why they did things like this, but all those who had been given regalia walked instead of riding horseback. But the drum was packed on a special horse by itself and when they came to a stream, four men who owned the drumsticks carried the drum across, wading in without taking off their moccasins or other clothing. Furthermore those who owned the regalia were not supposed to help feed the crowd. They were not allowed to serve food and if they did, they had to give something away. Nor were these men supposed to borrow. They were supposed to have their own cup or dish and when it [415] was time to eat, if they didn't have any receptacle, they spread out their robes and the servers poured the coffee or soup or whatever was being served right in the robes."

114 The above account is the only explicit record of the actual
174 transfer which was obtainable in the field. From details supplied
796 by this same informant, however, as well as by others not so old as she, but who have accurate traditional knowledge of Gros Ventre culture, we have considerable information on the Grass dance as practiced from the time it was adopted.⁷ Let us proceed then to the general description, first as the dance was carried out in the earlier period.

575 *Personnel and equipment.* At the time of adoption the Grass
796 dance came into the possession of a society, the Wolves or Wolfmen. Only members of the society actually danced, wearing the distinctive headdress of deer hair, although the rest of their costume varied with the individual. The special regalia which went with the dance were: 2 crow-belts; a large drum and 4 fancy drumsticks; a spear or fork; a spoon; 2 wands representing swords; a whistle.⁸ Each item was owned by an individual member of the society who was, by virtue of this ownership, an officer

[115] ⁷ I wish to thank all of my Gros Ventre friends for their assistance, especially The Boy, Thick, Thomas Main, Charles Buckman, Al and Corn Chandler, Mary Ereaux, Mathilda Cuts-the-Rope, but above all, my old "grandmothers," Coming Daylight and Singer.

⁸ For reference to description of some of these, see footnote 3.

GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

43

of the society. The officers were free to transfer their ceremonial equipment to other members whom they would select. Following the typical Gros Ventre pattern of transfer of ownership, the recipient would present as lavish gifts as he could afford to the donor while the relatives of the recipient showed their appreciation of the favor to their kinsman by giving away expensive gifts in his honor. All of this took place publicly at the dance. [575] [796] [431]

Particular dances and songs were attached to each office and the owners of the ceremonial drumsticks were required to know in correct order all the numerous songs and to provide the musical accompaniment for the whole ceremony. These four drumstick owners were joined in certain of the songs by four women singers selected from among the wives of the Wolf-men. The owners of the various objects were responsible for the proper care thereof, the crow-belts and the drum receiving most respect. When not in use, the crow-belts were kept wrapped in special bundles in the lodges of their respective owners, but were hung outside when the owner's wife was in her menstrual period. Moreover, those who danced wearing the crow-belts were obliged to refrain from sexual relations for two or three days previous to the dancing and, before donning the belts, to make a smudge of sweet-grass to incense themselves and the crow-belts. The drum, too, received special attention. One informant speaks of it as having been "nicely decorated," and we know from Kroeber's description⁹ that the trimming was very similar to that of the Assiniboine Grass dance drum.¹⁰ [841] [784] [833] [782] [534]

Procedure. The actual dancing took place in a special circular dancing-place in the center of the camp circle. This "corral," as it was sometimes referred to, was constructed from several lodge covers, but was open at the top and the entrance thereto was at the east. The tipi of the drum-keeper was put up nearby. Opposite the opening of the "corral" was the place of honor where sat the officials,—with the exception of the sword owners, who with their assistants were at either side of the entrance. The

⁹ Kroeber, loc. cit., p. 238.

¹⁰ Lowie, R. H., *The Assiniboine*, AMNH-AP 4, pt. 1, 1909, p. 67.

796 The regalia were placed in front of their owners. Lay members sat around the sides.

[354] 252 The fire was near the center of the dancing-place and beside
262 it the essential pot containing cooked dog flesh. The meat was
796 prepared by first rolling the carcass in very hot ashes to singe off the hair and until the flesh was almost black, after which the entrails were removed and the meat boiled. Incidentally, the Gros Ventres were very fond of the flesh of puppies and used it in large quantities to supplement other types of food for feasts at various gatherings, including the Grass dance. The food for the feast, of which all present at the Grass dance partook, was heaped to the east of the fire.

796 In this setting the ceremonial eating of dog flesh, which involved the preliminary dancing with crow-belts, and so on, was carried out. We shall refer hereafter to this whole performance as the dog ritual because this is the core of the Grass dance proper wherever found and, so far as the Gros Ventres are concerned, remained essentially unchanged from the earlier through the later period. We use the term "ritual" without implying that there was any religious significance attached to the performance in the minds of the Gros Ventres. Connected therewith were a few sex prescriptions the violation of which were believed to be punished by vague misfortune, but that it had any deeper meaning for the Gros Ventres there is no evidence. On the contrary, their indifference toward possible symbolism, for instance, is illustrated by their acceptance at face value of the statement as to origin and meaning by an old Sioux from Fort Peck, Black Prairie Chicken, who claimed that he personally had created the Grass Dance, saying that he had "gotten his instructions" from a rooster; that the headdress of upstanding red-dyed deer hair represented the rooster's comb and that the so-called crow-belt
796 177 was in reality a rooster's tail. My older informants knew this old man when he visited the Reservation many years ago, and they assured me that although the validity of his story was not questioned, it had had no effect. They maintained that when the dance was transferred to them, the Assiniboine had not mentioned

GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

45

where it had come from or anything about its origin, so the Gros⁷⁹⁶ Ventres simply performed it in the way it had been taught. They¹⁷⁷ continued to dance in the same way, and never at any time did they feel that the dance was connected with the white man's rooster, or that they were supposed to be imitating that type of fowl.

The ceremonial involved the donning of the crow-belts by their⁷⁹⁶ respective owners, preceded by the incensing of the owners and of the regalia. The song connected with the crow-belt had four stanzas, each repeated four times while the owners danced. One of the owners then lifted the pot containing the already prepared dog flesh and, walking clockwise, placed it in the proper position to the north of the fire. The two crow-belt owners and the owners of the fork and spoon then knelt to the west of the fire while the owners of the swords and their two *atsa'an* (servants, assistants) knelt opposite them on the other side of the fire. These eight, as they knelt, danced by raising their bodies up and down to the rhythm of a special song which was sung once by the four male singers, repeated "like a chorus" during which the drum was beaten slowly and the four women singers joined in. As the chorus was sung the dancers raised their arms as though in salute. This song, with chorus, was repeated four times. After this the eight rose and, to the accompaniment of another song, danced in single file, the owners of the crow-belts in the lead and second place. They circled the fire four times, at the beginning of each circuit hesitating for a moment at the pot and making a gesture toward it. The dancing became more violent with each round and, on the fourth, the dancers "put on quite a show," stamping harder than before and using great exertion. On this fourth round each one touched the pot and the last one in line, one of the *atsa'an*, grabbed it up and put it to the west of the fire. The eight dancers would be panting and tired by this time.

The second crow-belt owner, however, transferred his belt to the fork owner who then danced alone. He followed the same pattern of first dancing slowly, and, at the beginning of each round making merely a gesture toward the pot. On the fourth

796 circuit, when the tempo and vigor of the dance had appreciably increased, he finally speared the dog flesh, leaving his fork in the pot while he stood there resting for a few moments.

When the fork owner had somewhat recovered his breath, he took the dog flesh from the pot and put it in a big dish nearby. He then went to an outstanding warrior and, taking him by the hand, invited him to come up to the dish. In the same way he selected two other prominent warriors. One of these then asked some member of the society to select a fourth warrior, but this one must have been wounded at war. When he had been named, the fork owner invited him and led him to join the other three who were sitting in a semicircle facing the fire.

The owner of the crow-belt removed the feather-bustle from the fork man and tied it around the spoon owner. Then another song was started and the spoon owner went to the space between the fire and entrance to begin his circuit of the fire. He exhibited his graceful body with his best steps as he made three motions with the spoon over the heads of the seated warriors. On the fourth time he touched the meat with the spoon. After a short pause and when he was breathing more normally after his strenuous dancing, he touched the meat with the spoon and, having raised the spoon first upward and then downward, laid it on the tongue of each of the first three warriors. The warrior who had asked for the selection of the wounded warrior took the spoon and laid it on the tongue of that one.

796 Had any one of the four warriors indulged a short time pre-
688 viously in sexual intercourse, he was supposed not to allow the spoon to touch his tongue and refused by turning aside his head, thereby making a public confession. It would have done him no good to have refused to come to the center of the dancing-place when first invited because his hanging back would have caused even more attention and he would have been subjected to vulgar jeers. It was said by informants that occasionally one or another warrior would ignore the rule but that this was a dangerous thing to do. As a case in point it was related that one man, known to my informants, tried to get by with it and allowed the

GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

47

spoon to touch his tongue regardless of consequences. Some hours 796 later in the excitement accompanying the end of the dance, this 688 man's horse was jumping around and broke loose, was chased by a dog and ran against a log projecting from the corner of a corral. The horse was killed. The owner then admitted that this bad luck had befallen him because he had falsely allowed himself to be honored at the dance.

Following upon the performance with the spoon, the dog meat 796 was next distributed to the four warriors, the wounded warrior receiving the head. When the meat was eaten the skull was put down to the west of the fire. The four warriors remained seated while the other members danced for some time. So soon, however, as the singers switched to the appropriate music, the spoon owner dashed to the dog skull and pointed the skull in four directions, and the four warriors danced around, everybody else rising to dance at his place, yelling and calling out, while this song with chorus was sung once. All were then seated except the warriors who pranced around the fire four times. After this each of the four warriors in turn picked up the dog skull, pointed it in the direction in which he had accomplished the particular war deed he was to recount, and related his story. If one of them had been forced to refuse the spoon, the owner of the spoon would have to point the dog skull for him while the warrior talked and gestured. The warrior who had been wounded spoke last, and when he finished he tossed the dog skull outside of the dancing-place.

The owner of the whistle had a particular dance. When the accompaniment started, it was stated, "for some reason he did not dance alone. It seemed that all the members were glad and danced with him and kind of helped him. The song was repeated three more times. At the end of each 'stanza' the owner of the whistle would dance at the edge of the circle, apart from and very much faster than the other dancers." It was his privilege, too, to "punish" the dancers. At a signal from the owner of the whistle, the singers would switch to the "punishing songs" of which there [533] were said to have been ten in all. No one could drop out of the dancing while these were being sung. Each of the ten songs could

796 be repeated so that it was something of an ordeal. The sword owners would see to it that the dancers kept up, prodding the laggards until the series of songs had been completed.

[533] The singers themselves had a smoking song, one of the few
[177] songs of the Grass dance for which words were adopted along with the tunes¹¹ from the Assiniboine. This song indicated a period of rest and relaxation for all but it was required that one of the officers provide the pipe and mixture for the singers.

Any member who left the dancing-place was obliged to surrender some piece of personal property as insurance that he would return. If he did not come back, the property was forfeit.

796 Another distinctive feature of the earlier Grass dance was the
[43] throwing away of property and especially of wives. The term
586 "throwing away" is appropriate because a stick was held in the hand and after the holder publicly announced what the stick represented he would throw it to the ground. If, for instance, a member of the society had decided to give away his wife he would take a stick and say: "Here is so-and-so (naming the woman)" and throw the stick down. Sometimes another member would pick up the stick, thus indicating that he was taking this woman, but occasionally it happened that no one grabbed her and in such case the wife in question would return to live with her own relatives. The man who so renounced his wife was supposed to be through with her for good. It was said by informants, however, that once in a while, provided the wife had not been claimed
522 by another, the husband would want her back again. An in-
796 stance in illustration of this point was told to me. A man who
586 stood to my informant in the relation of enemy-friend¹² had so
572 disposed of his wife at a Grass dance. Some time later my informant saw the couple together again. My informant took ad-

[533] ¹¹ Most of the Gros Ventre Grass dance songs have no words proper. This contrasts with the Arapaho Grass dance songs, as my informants are well aware. The difference is perhaps due to the influence on the Arapaho of the Ghost Dance religion (cf. Kroeber, A. L., *The Arapaho*, AMNH-B 18, pt. 4, 1907, p. 320), which scarcely affected the Gros Ventres.

[572] ¹² This was a jking and rivalry relationship entered into by presenting to a fellow tribesman an object captured from the enemy.

GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

49

vantage of the occasion, as she had the right to do, to make fun⁵²² of her enemy-friend without his being able to retaliate. She⁷⁹⁶ took a handful of horse manure and rubbed it all over his face⁵⁸⁶ saying, "Oh! All of us at the Grass dance saw you throw her away, why are you going with her again?" and in this way called attention to the fact that he was not so "brave" as he had pretended to be.⁵⁷²

Another informant stated that she and her sister were just able⁷⁹⁶ to escape the embarrassing experience of so being given away.⁵⁸⁶ They were both living with a man who was a prominent member of the Wolf society. One of his fellow-members, however, came to the two women and told them that their husband planned on throwing them both away at the forthcoming Grass dance. My informant was very angry to get this news and said to her sister: "We will get ready and get rid of him first!" Whereupon they packed their belongings and taking their own horses went quickly to their mother's brother. My informant said that this man who was going to throw them away tried many times to speak to her thereafter but she always turned away and refused to listen, thinking to herself: "Well, there are plenty of other men."

As a final point in the discussion of the earlier form of the⁷⁹⁶ Grass dance, the custom of members giving away presents in⁴³¹ honor of their loved ones should be mentioned. This was a purely voluntary procedure and could be done by any member who wished to do so at any performance of the Grass dance. The following is a typical example of how this was carried out. The same informant last mentioned, married another member of the Wolf society not long after the incident she described above, and had been selected as one of the four women singers for the Grass dance. At one performance she was holding her infant daughter. her first child by this marriage, as she sang. Her husband, wishing to honor his little daughter, told a war story, went to his wife and took the child in his arms and, going to the center of the dancing-place, gave away a horse to one of the Assiniboine who happened to be visiting at the time of the dance.

Such was the form of the Grass dance as carried out by the *ovv*

- 796 Such was the form of the Grass dance as carried out by the
 178 Gros Ventres from the time of its adoption from the Assiniboine
 up to about 1890 when changes began creeping in.

THE FORM: LATER PERIOD

- 796 It should perhaps be emphasized at this point that the changes
 178 which characterized the Grass dance after 1890 were mostly in
 the nature of accretions around the nucleus as originally adopted,
 so that, although in 1901 the form of the Grass dance differed
 somewhat from the earlier form, as Kroeber noted,¹³ the whole
 was still distinctly recognizable as an expansion thereof.

Changes in personnel and equipment. At the turn of the century participation in the Grass dance was no longer restricted to members of a particular society. Everybody was free to join in. The Grass dance was, however, in charge of four officials, the "chiefs" who sat in the place of honor opposite the door and presided over the ceremony (Fig. 1). They were consulted on any matters pertaining to the performance, made rules, sometimes arbitrarily, during the dance, and were custodians of any fines collected. They were responsible for seeing to it that provisions were on hand when a dance was to be held. There were, moreover, two women officials, whose rank was said to be equal to that of the "chiefs" and whose insignia were ceremonial dresses of black cloth. These two sat to the right of the four chiefs.

- [625] The orders of the "chiefs" were enforced by two men who sat, one on either side of the door, holding whips with ornamental handles. These whips were apparently a simple substitution for the wands representing swords in the original Grass dance. The whip owners each had an assistant who ran errands and attended to getting water, keeping up the fire and so on. An entirely new feature was, however, the addition of two women who owned whips and their two female assistants. They likewise sat on each side of the door but behind the men. When it was time for the women to dance,—another innovation to which we shall refer later,—the women whip owners rose and danced in opposite di-

¹³ Kroeber, A. L., *Ethnology of the Gros Ventre*, AMNH-AP 1, pt. 4, 1908, p. 238.

GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

51

rections around the circle. It was understood that if any woman⁷⁹⁶ had not risen to dance by the time those holding whips reached¹⁷⁸ her, she would be lashed. These four women had the additional duty of helping serve when it was time for the general feast.

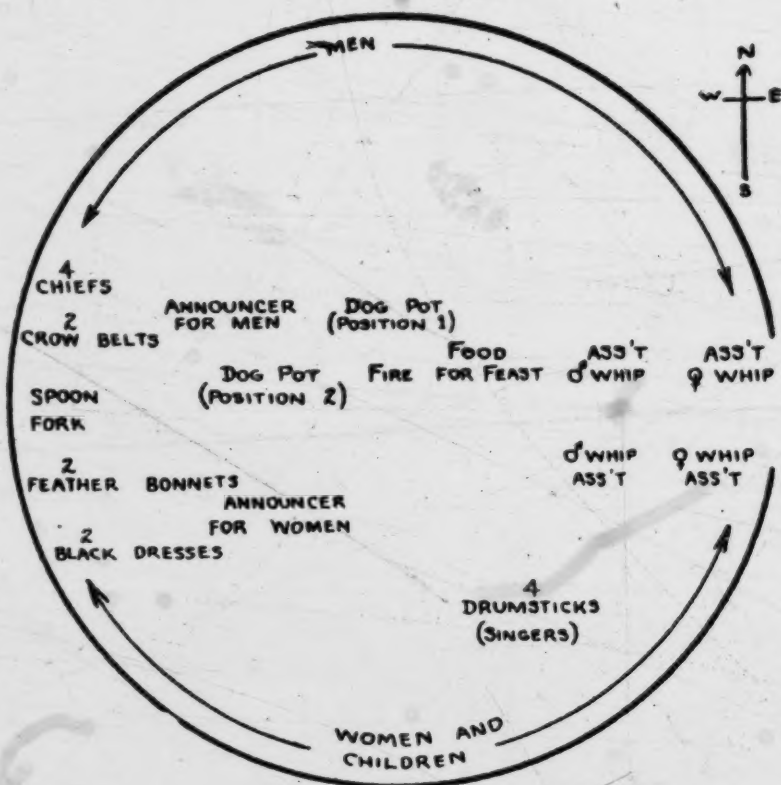


Fig. 1. Diagram of Dance Ground.

Considered as next in rank to the four "chiefs" were the four^[57] male singers, who, as in former times, owned the special drumsticks "decorated and official-looking, like emblems." They were expected to know faultlessly all of the many songs connected with^[68] the Grass dance as first adopted. If they should, for instance,

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[688] sing a song out of the prescribed order, the "chiefs" would stop them at once, announce the mistake and what fine was to be demanded of the singers. Were the four women singers performing at that time, they too were penalized.

[534] The owners of the drumsticks cooperated with the owner of the drum whose special duty it was to care for this instrument and to have it in repair and ready for use at any time it was needed.

The concepts pertaining to the crow-belts, spoon, fork and whistle remained unchanged. The owners of these regalia treated them with the same respect as of old. Additional ceremonial equipment had been introduced in the form of four feathered war-bonnets, two of which were owned by men and two by women. There was a special little ceremony connected with the two bonnets owned by women. Early in the dance two outstanding warriors were selected to take these bonnets from their owners, dance four times around the rack where they were hung in front of their owners, and then hand them to the first two women sitting at the left of the door. When it was time to dance these women would don them and wear them throughout that dance, then pass them on to the next two, and so on, until everyone had had a chance to wear them.

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624 Finally, there were two announcers, one who called out what he was directed to say by any of the men, and the other who publicized any statement to be made on behalf of the women.

All of these individuals were considered as office-holders in the Grass dance and, as formerly, each was free to transfer the office to anyone he considered suitable to succeed himself. There was no regular term of office even for the "chiefs" and the transfer was described as purely voluntary. Apparently, however, there was a certain amount of consultation among the officers, when one of them decided to transfer his office, in order to agree on a well-qualified successor. Among other things it was necessary to consider the financial status of the individual, especially for those to take over the higher offices. Not only did the recipient heap property upon the donor, but according to the older pattern too, [431] the relatives of the recipient would give away horses and so on

GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

53

in his honor, and there were certain obligations connected with some of the offices in the newer form of the Grass dance, such as payment for the privilege by the black-dress wearers of being invited to come near the fire in the center and eat dog flesh. Furthermore a new "chief" would almost without exception provide the wherewithal for a whole dance to show that he was worthy of the office. 796
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[437]
[622]

The procedure of transfer was similar for each office. If, for instance, one of the four "chiefs" had decided he had held this position long enough, at one of the dances he would order the transferring song to be sung. He, together, with the other three, would rise and dance around more or less deliberately and in a dignified manner. When these four reached the man who was to receive the office, each of the other three would make a motion toward the recipient as though helping him to his feet, while the donor himself would actually take his hand and assist him to arise. They then led him around the dancing place and finally installed the new officer in the place of honor vacated by the donor. It was customary, as the donor approached the region where the recipient was sitting, for everyone in the vicinity to bow his head as though making himself inconspicuous. None of them was supposed to know ahead of time on whom the choice would fall and, according to Gros Ventre etiquette, it would be very bad form for anyone to seem eager to receive an office, or any kind of honor for that matter. [576]

Changes in procedure. In this later period the Grass dance was held sometimes out of doors in a circular space enclosed by wagons, at other times in a large log building, the ground plan of which was as nearly round as it could be made. It was remarked in this connection that the modern rectangular community hall at Hays, on the Reservation, was no good for Gros Ventre ceremonies, including the Grass dance, "because everything we did was in a circle." The present almost circular community hall at Lodge Pole is considered much more satisfactory. The seating arrangements were very similar to those described for 796
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796 the original Grass dance, the number participating, however, both
178 as officers and as general audience, being very much larger.

Although the dog ritual, carried out as described for the earlier period, remained the highlight and climax of the Grass dance, the general program had been enlarged to include other features. Not only were procedures introduced in connection with the newer offices, as indicated above, but other items such as the Owl dance and the Ringtail dance were introduced. The order of events was apparently determined by the "chiefs" at each performance of the Grass dance, but the general program did not vary markedly. The Ringtail dance, for instance, was always included at some time.

When the order for the Ringtail dance was given, any who wished to participate formed a circle facing inward and both men and women were free to choose partners of the opposite sex. The man placed his arm over the shoulders of his partner while she placed her arm around his back. The whole group moved in a circle clockwise in rhythm to the music provided by a group of singers other than those who sang and drummed for the dog ritual and other ceremonies in which officers as such participated.

[87] Any middle-aged or older woman who wished to do so might join the singers for any of the round dances. If none volunteered then they were sometimes drafted simply by being invited and led over to the spot where the male singers were performing.

796 It occasionally happened that during this dance, when the sing-
533 ers had "hit the spot,"—aroused the spirit of the crowd and the
178 floor was full,—the singers would stop all of a sudden, but without giving the usual signal to disperse. Then, without advance notice, they would start singing again, but a different song, a "punishing song." This was a feature obviously based on the "punishing songs" of the original Grass dance, but the tunes were different and it was carried out in the following way.

There were only two of these newer "punishing songs" but as soon as the dancers heard the singers start one of them they knew what it meant: "Now we are in for it. We will have to dance and dance!" The singers could sing the first of these

GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

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songs as many times as they pleased, and when tired of that one⁷⁹⁶ switched to the others. There was no intermission and the⁵³³ dancers got no rest, even the old women would stand up and¹⁷⁸ dance in one place and the old men would be yelling and calling out from where they sat. It was evidently a very lively scene. The dancers would sweat and get tired, but still there would be no let up. Finally the four wearers of the feathered war bonnets, —two men and two women,—would begin voicing appeals to the four "chiefs": "Please do something to stop this dance!" But the "chiefs" did not act right away. At last one of them would get up and walk around until he approached the wearer of a war-bonnet. He would then remove the bonnet and the people were glad and would cheer and yell, but this was not yet the end. They kept on dancing until a second of the "chiefs" got up and removed a war-bonnet from another of the wearers, which finally brought the Ringtail dance to a close.

It was said that while the women who wore black dresses could have answered the appeal to stop the dance, as a rule they would have hesitated to do so because the ones who took upon themselves this privilege would have to pay heavily for it. When the people had quieted down after the strenuous dance, those who had removed the war-bonnets would get up and announce what they were paying for having done so. One might have said, for instance: "All right. I will kill a beef for the next dance," or "I will give money." and name the sum. He could donate whatever^[43] he wished, but it was understood that it would be something really substantial. My informants explained that although the Ringtail dance was a regular feature of the Grass dance program, the "punishing songs" were not sung every time because "the reason for singing them was that the people hoped to have a Grass dance again soon and wanted an elaborate affair and so the singers had to use discretion; if the 'chiefs' happened to be in a good financial condition at the time, they made them 'shell out' in that way."

The owners of the ceremonial drumsticks retained the smoking song as described for the earlier period. It was the "chiefs" who

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687] were supposed to come prepared with pipe, tobacco, and matches in anticipation of this song. If, for some reason, one of the four was unable to furnish at least a pipeful of mixture, and could not borrow one, he was immediately arrested by the owners of the whips and punished by the singers who might tear his shirt at the neck so everyone could see it, or, perhaps, pour over him a good cupful of broth made from dog flesh. This broth has a strong and lasting odor. The female officers were likewise expected to give the women singers a smoke. The smoking song marked an intermission. No one danced to this song and all sat around smoking and taking it easy.

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178 If things got too dull, however, one of the owners of the whips might get up, call the announcer, and say: "Tell my friends that I am going to whip them if they don't dance. I will have the right to whip them because I am going to pay for it," and he would present a bridle, or perhaps five dollars, or something of that order of magnitude, to anyone he wished. It was understood, then, that the next time the singing started this man might hit any person,—even one of the "chiefs,"—who failed to dance.

Another feature reminiscent of the original Grass dance but showing some slight change, was the provision that anyone who wished might have it announced that he was going to "lock the door," which meant that nobody could go home until the dance was over. For doing this however he had to provide all the necessary food for another Grass dance to be held on the night immediately following. It was up to the owners of the whips to enforce the regulation by taking something valuable, say a hat or a blanket, from anyone who left the dance and the article was forfeit if he failed to return.

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626 [689] Based on the same concept, the practice grew up of forcing attendance in the following way. Once in a while the owners of the whips might order their assistants to go from door to door in the whole community and take something belonging to each householder, say a bridle, or a valuable belt, or a gun, and bring it to the dancing-place. If the owner of the object were not at the dance, his property was returned to him only if he promised

GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

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to provide food for the next dance. If he failed to redeem it by such promise, he had one more chance to do so by appearing at the following dance. If he did not show up on that occasion the announcer was told to call out: "The one who owns this bridle (or belt, or gun, etc.) does not want it." Whereupon the article would be thrown in the fire and destroyed.

Although the custom of "throwing away" wives gradually died out, the giving away of valuable property to honor loved ones continued and was elaborated. The following is only one example from many which might be cited as illustrative of attitudes. The informant is now a man in his early seventies. He stated: "When I was a young man I never went to these social affairs. After I married my wife would go with my older brother every time there was a Grass dance, but I would stay at home. This brother of mine used to get after me for not taking part. He would say: 'It is bad to be the way you are. When there is a dance or anything going on, go and look on. You don't necessarily have to dance, but at least be present.' One time in later years the Cheyenne came to visit and of course the Gros Ventres put on a dance for them. I decided to go and for the first time I joined in. When my brother saw me he got up and said: 'Well, my friends, I have been asking my brother to look on and to take part in these dances, and I have never succeeded. But today I see him at this dance and I am glad he is here. I am glad he is joining with us.' Then my brother went out and brought to the dancing-place a new yellow-wheeled buggy and a set of harness he had just purchased, and announced: 'Now, because my brother has joined the dance I am proud he did, and in his honor I am giving away this buggy and harness to the visitors.' Then my brother's wife announced: 'I am happy that my brother-in-law is joining the dance. I will give a beef to the visitors so they will kill it and have meat to eat.' Of course I felt embarrassed. It was hard on me because I thought everybody was looking at me and I sweated. Afterwards I told my brother: 'I didn't go in there for the purpose of having you give away all that stuff in my honor!' But he replied: 'Well, that is the way of our people

796 and we follow that. But don't stop going. You went once, so
178 keep going.' And so I did go and when I noticed that at nearly
431 every dance my brother gave away beef or horses—he was cer-
tainly a generous man—I started to follow his example. It got so
that whenever there was a dance I was the first one there and I
used to give away all kinds of things. For my adopted daughter,
for instance, I gave beef, horses, and money at different times."

796 The final event of the program of the Grass dance during the
178 later period was a dance by one of the owners of the feathered
war-bonnets who, to the accompaniment of a special song, stepped
toward the door, made three passes towards the latch and on the
fourth actually opened the door, took off the bonnet and went
out. Everyone by that time would be standing up ready to go
with their bundles and babies. It was remarked that since they
usually started the Grass dance about one in the afternoon and
stopped only well after midnight, they had plenty of time for all
these things.

796 In this section we have dealt only with the main differences
178 between the earlier and later forms of the Grass dance as prac-
858 tised by the Gros Ventres. Other minor changes were introduced
from time to time, one being that of allowing children on the
dancing floor. This will be briefly described merely to indicate
the latitude allowed to the individual in the later period during
which the Gros Ventre Grass dance flourished, and to illustrate
the mechanism by which some, at least, of the changes could have
been actually accomplished. My informant, who had held im-
portant offices in the Grass dance and who is a man of promi-
nence, said that, up to the time he acted in this matter, it had
been the duty of the owners of the whips to take children bold
enough to mingle with the dancers and drag them off the floor by
force. It was obvious to my informant that the children were
anxious to dance so at one of the performances he tied a bunch
of paper money to the amount of \$50 on the end of a buggy whip
and had the announcer call out that he was going to buy for the
children the privilege of joining in the dancing; that he was not
only paying for this by giving the money toward the next per-

GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

59

formance of the Grass dance, but that he was also paying for this by cancelling debts owed him at his store by four specific individuals whom he named; that anyone who objected to the children having the privilege would have to raise the ante; and that finally he would inaugurate this new feature of the Grass dance by having all of his own children dance first. No one disputed the point, and from that day to this children have had the freedom of the floor at any of the social gatherings. 796
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The innovation described above was probably one of the last changes made in the form of the Grass dance before it began to disintegrate about 1916. Once the dog ritual was abandoned,—seemingly just prior to 1920,—the Grass dance as such disappeared, leaving only the round dances, one or two of which survive today and are performed at annual fairs, at celebrations of the Fourth of July, and so on.

Let us now turn to a consideration of the functions of the Grass dance in Gros Ventre culture in each of the two periods.

FUNCTIONS

Earlier period. When the Grass dance was first adopted by the Gros Ventres its function was a relatively minor one of replacing the dance belonging to one of the two "soldier" societies, the Wolves, or Wolf-men as the members were called. The members of the parallel society were known as Stars. These two societies were approximately equal numerically and included between them the whole Gros Ventres population of able-bodied warriors. At the age of 18 or 19 the individual Gros Ventre young man who, together with say 30-50 of his age-mates, already belonged to one of several "companies"—the Rosebushes, or Calves, or Resting-on-the-breast-of-a-woman, or Holding-dogs'-tails, and so forth,—would enter either the Wolf society or the Star society, whichever one was selected by the "company." The individual would then be either a Wolf-dancer or a Star-dancer, although he retained close personal association with the members of his "company" which would have entered one society or the other as a body. With the mates of his "company" he would then go through the 796
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796 preliminary to the series of Sacred Dances, namely the Fly Dance.
575 After this ceremony was over he was eligible as a "soldier." That is, should one of the members of his "company" vow to give any one of the Sacred Dances in the series, he and other members of the society to which he belonged—either Wolf or Star—would act as police for the time during which the Dance was being held. Thus it was that Stars might police the hunt [625] and keep order in the camp circle during one such Sacred Dance while Wolves might perform the same duties at another time, depending on which moiety the vower belonged to.

When not engaged as soldiers in connection with one of the Dances, the two societies exhibited the keenest rivalry, particularly in war-deeds, but also in gambling, in foot-racing, and whenever else opportunity offered. One aspect of this rivalry was apparent when each put on its own dance. The general procedure of both was identical but there were a few distinctive features. When the whole tribe was together and there was no serious threat of war, one society or the other would decide the time was ripe to hold its dance. Let us assume that the Star society had so decided.

The members of the Star society would then don their best clothes and, mounted on their finest horses, go around the camp circle accompanied by two especially prominent members who had counted coup against the enemy while on horseback. They would [533] sing special begging songs in front of the lodges of several well-to-do members of the opposite society. It was a challenge to the Wolf-men and they usually responded in the accepted fashion by giving large quantities of food, in which their relatives would help them out. This would provide the feast at the dance. The Stars then proceeded to the opening of the camp circle and all dismounting except the two very prominent warriors, formed in a line by twos, the four singers with their hand drums last. To the accompaniment of a marching song the line moved "snake-dance" fashion weaving back and forth, to the dancing lodge which had been erected in the center of the camp circle. At the entrance to the lodge the line divided, some going to the right,

GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

61

others to the left forming a circle inside the dancing-place where they sat. The two prominent warriors, having been assisted in dismounting, took up their places, one on each side of the entrance, holding whips in their hands. It was their duty to rouse any lagging dancers, whipping them if necessary. Each member had his own rattle, of peculiar shape but painted with individual designs, which he waved about as he danced. The wives of some of the dancers joined the four singers in singing certain of the dance songs. Two of the youngest members acted as *atsa'an* (waiters) tending to the fire, getting water, and so on. Occasionally during the dance a woman relative of one of the participants would rush up to him, throw down a blanket or some other gift in his honor, grab his rattle and dance for a short time. Members of the other society did not join in the festivities or partake of the feast, in spite of the fact that most of the provisions for the latter had been donated by some of them. [43]

At some future date, however, the Wolf-men would agree that the time was auspicious for them to have a dance and "get even" with the Stars. They would of course have their own songs, sung in front of the lodges of prominent members of the Star society, but otherwise the procedure was identical, including their accompaniment by two outstanding warriors, the "snake-dance," the arrangement of the lodge in the center of the camp-circle, and so on. The Wolf-men differed from the Stars in their actual dance in that they did not have rattles and in dancing seemingly intended to portray wolves, placing one hand on the forehead and the other at the back to represent the animal's tail.¹⁴ [534]

The adoption of the Grass dance meant merely that the more elaborate dog ritual, with its regalia and greater degree of organization, replaced the dance of the Wolf-men although the begging preliminary and so on remained the same. So far as we can see, at the time of its adoption, the Grass dance was a case of pure substitution and one that fitted readily into the cultural situation. First of all, according to Lowie's information, the Assini-

¹⁴ I am deeply grateful to my colleague, John M. Cooper, who generously placed at my disposal his field notes on the Wolf society.

796 boine themselves considered the Grass dance as a modern form
 575 of one of their own older soldier society dances.¹⁵ Secondly there
 178 were certain similarities between the original Star and Wolf
 dances on the one hand and the Grass dance on the other. In
 both types there was dancing to exhaustion and the employment
 of special officers to rouse the laggards,—the whip men in the
 first instance, the sword men in the other. Again women singers
 helped out occasionally in both. Still another feature in common
 was the custom of giving presents away, not to a relative who
 was a member, but in honor of that relative. Thus, the Grass
 dance became a part of Gros Ventres culture.

182 So long as Gros Ventre culture continued on its traditional eco-
 178 nomic basis, the hunting of buffalo, the Grass dance fulfilled its
 function as the dance of the Wolf soldier society and was simply
 parallel to the dance of the rival Star society. The disappearance
 of the buffalo, however, wrought many changes in Gros Ventre
 life as it did in that of all of the Plains tribes. The Gros Ventres
 were fortunate in that the last large herd of buffalo happened to
 be in their hunting territory and thus they could benefit a little
 longer than most of their neighbors from this mainstay of their
 old way of life. This is not to say that prior to the extinction of
 the buffalo Gros Ventre culture was flourishing in pristine glory.

[177] Far from it. For one thing, at the time of the adoption of the
 Grass dance between 1875 and 1880, intertribal warfare, with
 which many aspects of their culture were interrelated, was at a
 minimum and was itself soon to disappear. Again, certain
 aspects of their ceremonial life had fallen into disuse, some of the
 Sacred Dances not having been given for years previously.
 Nevertheless, although the religious culture was dwindling, much
 was still left and the social side was relatively intact.

182 Later period. The break in economic life with the killing of
 796 the last of the buffalo in 1884 was accompanied by the virtual
 disappearance of the Gros Ventre ceremonial organization. The
 public rites of a religious nature, which had formerly made for
 social solidarity as well, were abandoned. The last Sacrifice

¹⁵ Lowie, loc. cit. p. 66.

GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

63

Dance (Sun Dance), for example, was given in that very year¹⁸² and, so far as our data go, but one Crazy Dance was held after⁷⁹⁶ that. The seasonal Flat Pipe rite was discontinued. Furthermore there was a breakdown in the socio-political life. The necessity for nomadic life had disappeared and as a consequence there was no longer need of policing the hunt or keeping order in^[575] the camp circle when the whole tribe gathered so that, with the further establishment of peace, the *raison d'être* for two rival soldier societies was gone.

In the transition period the missionaries were trying valiantly to fill the gap in religious life but did not offer a satisfactory^[797] solution for the social situation; nor did the Agency which had become the center of the new economic life. It was the Grass dance, which as we have seen survived in a somewhat changed form, that seems to have filled the void left in social life.

In its earlier form the Grass dance was purely social in nature,⁷⁹⁶ as was the Star dance, but the latter faded away while the^[535] former attained a position of heightened importance. One of the factors accounting for this fact seems to be that the Grass dance "had more to it," as our informants put it. The performance of the dog ritual was certainly far more spectacular than the simpler dance of the Star society and, in addition, it had semi-ceremonial connotations reminiscent of other features of the older Gros Ventre culture which were lacking from the Star dance. For example, the owners of the regalia in the Grass dance were likewise officers of several degrees of importance therein, as was the case in the performance of the Sacred Dances. Again, sex abstinence was required before dancing with the crow-belts as it was^[784] before participating in the Sacrifice Dance (Sun Dance) and before dancing with the Feathered Pipe. Ceremonial incensing of persons and equipment had been a marked characteristic of Gros^[783] Ventre religious life. The formal transfer of office and regalia duplicates the pattern of transfer of office of Pipe Keeper, transfer of painted lodges, and so on. Recounting of war deeds was frequently demanded in connection with many aspects of Gros Ventre life,—to validate the giving of a name, the erection of a

796 new lodge, certain practices in connection with the Flat Pipe, as well as in the dog ritual of the Grass dance. All in all the Grass dance was so much more colorful that, with choice left strictly to the individual, as it was after the "companies" were no longer formed, it seems probable that greater and greater numbers elected to join the Grass dancers. In time the Star society consequently lacked sufficient recruits to maintain its identity.

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178 The addition of the round dances, such as the Ringtail, around the dog ritual nucleus, allowed all to actively participate. In this way the Grass dance provided occasion for group recreational outlets, while at the same time fulfilling another function formerly carried out by the public religious rites, namely, that of enhancing the feeling of social solidarity. One aspect of the public religious rites had been a nice balance in their performance between periods of ritual solemnity and those of secular gaiety and relaxation. The Grass dance now approximated this situation to some degree in the reserve which the audience maintained during the performance of the ceremonial parts of the dog ritual, and the verve with which it entered into the other parts of the program, especially the round dances. If one may judge from the enthusiasm expressed by informants who knew the Grass dance between 1900 and 1916, it was a most stimulating and enjoyable affair. Each performance drew in a large proportion of the tribe, even those from the far corners of the Reservation.

In spite of its ceremonial features, the Grass dance was always looked upon as social rather than religious, and it could be given at any time. It thus became the accepted manner of entertaining the frequent visitors from other tribes and furthermore was eminently adapted to form the central part of Fourth of July celebrations and the like.

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We have seen that in its later phase the Grass dance became more highly organized with the addition of new offices and a few new items of equipment. The expansion of offices meant retaining and underlining the recognition of types of ability formerly premiated while allowing for shifting emphases to different types of ability.

GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

65

The addition of the four "chiefs" of the Grass dance gave scope for public recognition of the middle-aged men of substance esteemed for their wisdom and judgment to whom office-holding proportionate for their dignity was otherwise denied. Although there was no longer opportunity for the ranks of warriors to swell, those who had in the past performed brave deeds could still gain status by being called upon to publicly recount them at the ceremonial eating of dog flesh and by being selected to handle the feathered bonnets. 796
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As the younger men had no chance to show their prowess in warfare and hunting, there was a change of emphasis to recognition of superior singing and dancing ability as one of the roads to public approval. This latter was brought out clearly by our informants when explaining the qualifications of those sought for the various officers of the Grass dance as it was performed around the turn of the century. 796
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They stated that much of the success of the performance of the Grass dance depended particularly on the singers of the dog ritual songs. The four singers who owned the ceremonial drumsticks were chosen for their good voices and from among the "lively men who liked to do things." The candidates did not have to know the songs in advance because they could be trained. Two noted teachers were The Boy and Joe Big Beaver. The Boy said he used to "campaign against himself" when it was time for a drumstick to be transferred because "he didn't want to get tied down. He enjoyed dancing and the singers never got a chance to participate." Our informants told us of two men who are remembered especially as being outstanding singers and drummers, Ed Rider and Breath. The latter was described as a top-ranking singer who, so far as they knew, had never been surpassed. They said: "It was something worth listening to when Breath started those Grass dance songs. He had a voice adapted to that kind of singing and his sense of rhythm was superb. He could hold a big crowd of people spellbound. He was a real genius. Many others tried to copy him and learn from him, but none ever succeeded in equalling him. Regardless of his fine voice no one

796 even acquired his technique for beating the drum, that is, of be-
178 ginning lightly and then, in an inimitable manner, of increasing
555 the volume. Sometimes the other three singers would let him
begin a song and sing it through once just to listen to him. He
was left-handed, but he sure could beat the drum! He was a man
of whom you could say he had a real personality as far as the
Grass dance was concerned but who was not so noticeable outside
this one field. He was always deliberate but as soon as he ap-
proached the dancing-place he seemed to come alive. He was
good at that office in the Grass dance and he knew it. He would
sit up at the drum as straight as a lord and never attempted to be
inconspicuous as, for instance, by putting his hat down over his
eyes. Many of the young fellows who usually didn't join in the
dancing and liked to play around on the outside would neverthe-
less rush from every direction to get to the floor when they saw
him coming."

196 While singing had always held an important place in Gros
Ventre religious culture, in the past the emphasis had been on the
meaning of the song far more than on the quality of the voice
and the manner of performing as it was in the Grass dance.
Similarly in times gone by what dancing there was in the various
rites was more or less perfunctory, whereas in the Grass dance
the ownership of the two crow-belts, the fork, the spoon, and the
whistle was transferred to those among the younger men who had
[554] physical vigor and endurance as well as grace. For these offices
"it took a good-looking young man in good physical condition to
perform properly."

796 A still greater innovation was the inclusion of women as officers
178 of the Grass dance. The two ceremonial black dresses were
562 seemingly symbolic of the black paint used in the Victory dance
of former years, especially in view of the fact that this was one
of the few dances performed by women in the old culture. It
should be mentioned, however, that in connection with the Victory
dance there had been no formal office nor had the participants
therein been under economic obligations. We might hazard the
guess that the ownership by women of two of the war-bonnets in

GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

67

the Grass dance may have seemed appropriate to the Gros Ventres as reminiscent of the feather headdress worn by the participants in the Women's Dance belonging to the series of vowed Sacred Dances. But regardless of the possible symbolism, these four offices, plus the four others allotted to women,—two whip owners and their two assistants,—gave the female sex a fair degree of recognition, and probably reflect the newer economic status of women which came about with the changing concept of inheritance. Formerly women, of course, had a right to their own property, but acquisition thereof was mainly through their own manufacture, such as clothing, or through the relatively rare gift of a horse or so. They did not come in for any valuable property through inheritance and a widow in those days was not even entitled to any of her deceased husband's belongings. [425]

The holding of office in the Grass dance thus offered one of the very few means remaining for acquisition of status by the individual. The frequent transfer of offices meant that there was opportunity for many individuals within each category,—mature men, older warriors, young men, women,—to enjoy such public recognition. [428]

Public display of generosity in giving away property to honor a loved one, which became such a marked feature of the Grass dance in its later phase, carried on and accentuated the method most common in older Gros Ventre culture for the gaining of individual prestige. Formerly there were many opportunities for this kind of ostentatious liberality,—when a pipe or a painted lodge was transferred, when a warrior returned from accomplishing brave deeds, when a person was participating in one of the Sacred Dances, when a person was named, when a child's ears were pierced, and so on. At such times the relatives publicly gave away as much of their property as they possibly could,—not to the recipient of the pipe, the brave warrior, the participant in the Sacred Dance, et al.,—but to someone else in his honor. Everybody would know what was given and by whom; people would make such comments as: "So-and-so is a fine man. He surely must think a lot of his relative—look at all the things he [431]

796 gave away in his honor." When first adopted the Grass dance
 178 offered only one such opportunity—and a relatively minor one.
 431 As times changed, however, the Grass dance provided practically
 156 the sole occasion for gaining prestige while at the same time
 554 carrying out the old pattern of kinship obligation by enhancing
 the prestige of relatives.

The possibility in the later form of the Grass dance of paying for privileges, such as locking the door, or whipping those who did not get up to dance, gave further scope for the acquisition of prestige through liberality, as did also, of course, payments at transfer of office.

It was estimated by our informants that around 1900 as much as a thousand dollars in goods and cash changed hands at a single performance of the Grass dance. At that time it was not uncommon for the dance to be held at weekly intervals. So long as the Gros Ventre were relatively prosperous and had property to display and exchange according to the older patterns, the Grass dance continued to function. With increasing poverty, however, along
 [735] with other factors such as the changing points of view and interests on the part of the younger generation, and the dying out of
 [182] the older warriors, the Grass dance, the core of which was the dog ritual, gradually paled off leaving but the remnants of some of the round dances which had been added to the Grass dance as originally adopted from the Assiniboine.

SUMMARY

796 Between 1875 and 1880 the Gros Ventres received the Grass
 177 dance from the Assiniboine. From the date of adoption up to
 575 about 1890 the Grass dance was performed only by members of one of the two soldier societies and the custodians of the ceremonial equipment were the officers. Offices were transferred among members according to the old Gros Ventre pattern.

796 The essential core of the Grass dance was the dog ritual, a
 [262] ceremonial eating of dog flesh, carried out by the owners of the equipment with the assistance of four warriors selected from among the lay members. Other features of the program at each

GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

69

Other features of the program at each
 performance of the Grass dance included the "punishing" dance. 796
 the smoking song, the forfeiture of property, the "throwing [533]
 away" of property represented by sticks, gift-giving in honor of 432
 loved ones.

In 1890 changes in the form of the Grass dance began to be notice- 796
 able. By 1900 the Grass dance included all in the tribe who wished 178
 to participate. The official personnel had been expanded to in-
 clude four "chiefs," four war-bonnet owners, two owners of cere-
 monial black dresses, two women whip-owners and two female
 assistants. Transfer of all offices was, however, carried out as
 before.

The dog ritual continued unchanged to be the highlight of the
 program. Perhaps the most obvious change in procedure was the
 inclusion of round dances, especially the Ringtail dance, in which
 both men and women participated and for which "punishing"
 songs had been devised. The smoking song and the forfeiture of [533]
 property were retained, but with some elaborations. Although
 the "throwing away" of property gradually disappeared, the
 gift-giving in honor of relatives was very much emphasized.
 Other very minor changes were inaugurated at intervals up until
 about 1916.

The changing functions of the Grass dance coincide with the
 changing form and can likewise be considered as of two periods,
 —the first—from 1875–80 to 1890; the second from 1890 to 1916.

In the first period the function of the Grass dance was a rela-
 tively minor one. It was adopted, and fitted into place, as a sub-
 stitute for the simpler and less colorful dance of the Wolf soldier
 society, and paralleled the dance of the other soldier society, the [575]
 Star society. In view especially of the preliminary "begging"
 songs, the Grass dance seemingly was the expression of but one
 phase of the intense rivalry between the two soldier societies.

With the extinction of the buffalo in 1884 came the breakdown [182]
 of the older culture. By 1890 not only had most of the public
 religious rites disappeared, but the social organization was greatly
 altered. As the economic basis was changed, the nomadic life and
 the camp circle were abandoned, and the two soldier societies no

796 longer existed. The dance of one of them, the Grass dance, how-
 178 ever, survived. In its changed form the Grass dance filled the
 void in social life during the transition from old to new.

With the admission of all to membership and through the ad-
 dition of round dances in which all could actively participate, the
 Grass dance met the needs for group recreational outlets and for
 expression of social solidarity.

796 As the sole surviving institution which carried the concept of
 178 graded offices and their transfer, the Grass dance met the need of
 554 the individual for status along traditional lines. The expansion
 of offices allowed for the recognition of types of ability formerly
 premiated and opened the way for younger men as well as for
 women in emphasizing different kinds of ability.

Finally, the Grass dance met the need of the individual for
 prestige in accordance with the older pattern by offering op-
 portunity for ostentatious liberality. By bestowing gifts publicly
 [431] at the Grass dance, one could gain the coveted reputation for
 generosity, while at the same time fulfilling a substantial part of
 one's obligation to kinsmen.

796 The Grass dance continued to function in this way up to about
 182 1916, after which time it began gradually to pale off, and to prac-
 tically disappear by 1920. The few round dances carried on at
 present under the name "Grass dance" bear no appreciable rela-
 tionship to the lively and colorful performances that are remem-
 bered by the older Gros Ventres as having been so stimulating
 and enjoyable.